

# A Public Health Approach to School Crisis Response and Recovery



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# Today's Agenda

## What Is Child Trauma

- What We Have Learned From School Related Violent Incidents
- What We Have Learned From the Impact of Terrorism
- Establishing Partnerships with Mental Health and Social Service Agencies
- Restoring the Learning Environment

# **National Child Traumatic Stress Network**

## **NCTSN.org**



**The mission of the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) is to raise the standard of care and improve access to services for traumatized children, their families and communities throughout the United States.**

Marleen Wong, Director, School  
Crisis and Intervention Unit, UCLA  
and Duke University

# **Range of Traumatic Events**

- **Trauma is embedded in the fabric of daily life**
  - **Child Abuse and maltreatment**
  - **Domestic violence**
  - **Community violence**
  - **Medical trauma**
  - **Natural disasters**
  - **Terrorist attacks**

# What is TRAUMA?

- Trauma is an acute stress response that one experiences when confronted with **sudden, unexpected, unusual human experience.**
- Trauma occurs because the event **poses a serious threat to the individual's life** or physical integrity or to the life of a family member or close friend, or to one's surrounding environment.
- Individuals who may have witnessed the event are also at risk to develop a trauma stress response.

**War in America - September 11, 2001**

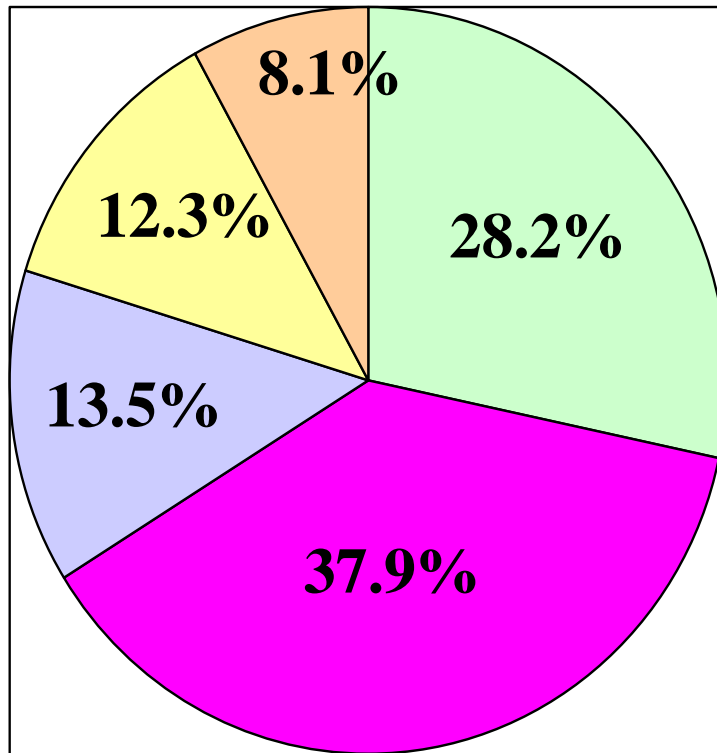
**8 million witnesses to violence in NYC**

**1.2 million students-New York City Public Schools**



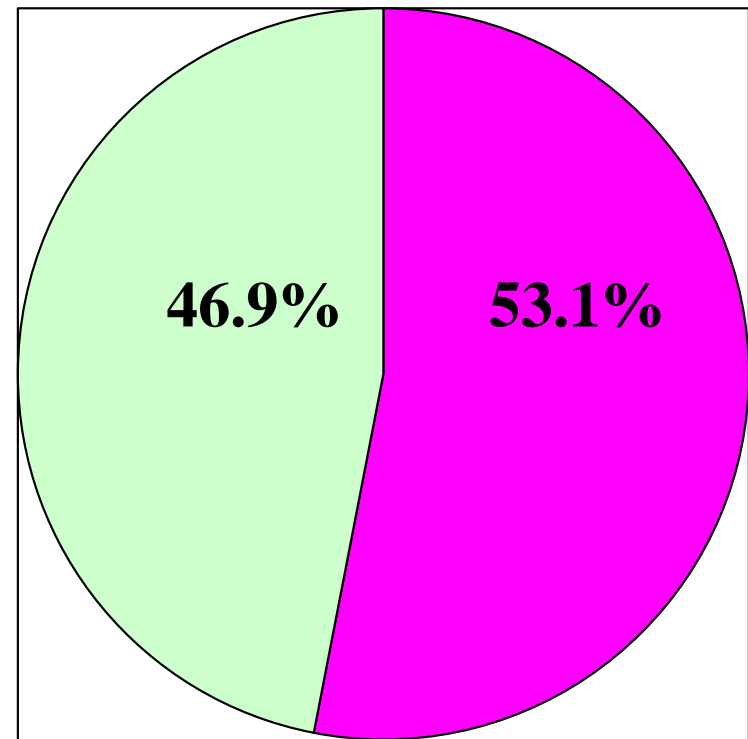
# Gender and Ethnicity of NYC School Survey Participants Grades 4-12 (N = 8,266)

## Ethnicity



<span style="color: #90EE90;">■</span> African-American	<span style="color: #FF00FF;">■</span> Hispanic
<span style="color: #ADD8E6;">■</span> White	<span style="color: #FFFF00;">■</span> Asian
<span style="color: #FFA500;">■</span> Other/Mixed	

## Gender



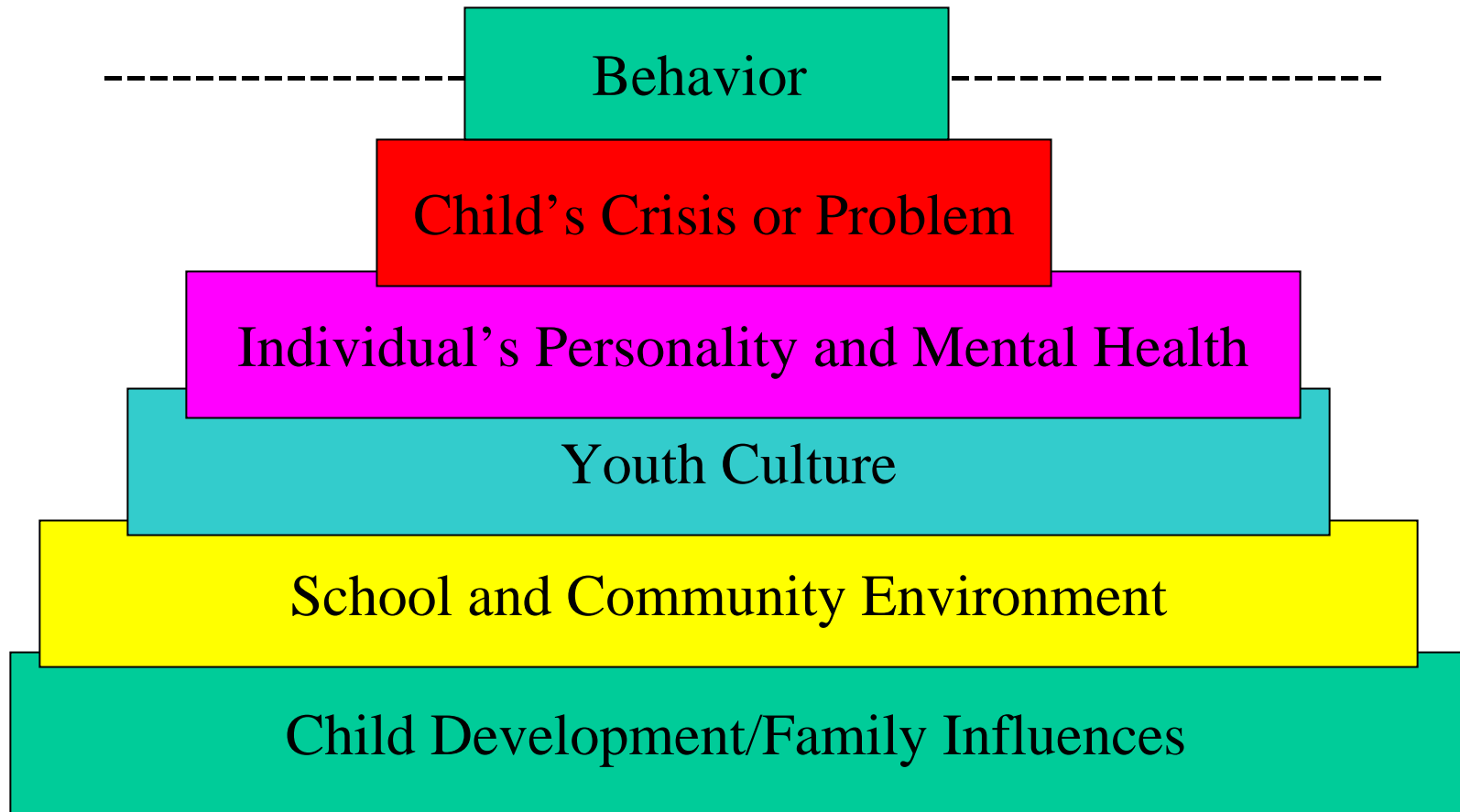
<span style="color: #FF00FF;">■</span> Female	<span style="color: #90EE90;">■</span> Male
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**Numbers of NYC Students in Grades 4-12  
Estimated to Have a Probable Disorder with Impairment  
6 Months After the 9/11 Attack**

<b>Disorder</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Estimated#of Students</b>
<b>PTSD</b>	<b>10.5</b>	<b>75,176</b>
<b>Major Depression</b>	<b>8.4</b>	<b>60,141</b>
<b>Generalized Anxiety</b>	<b>10.3</b>	<b>73,744</b>
<b>Separation Anxiety</b>	<b>12.3</b>	<b>88,064</b>
<b>Conduct Disorder</b>	<b>10.9</b>	<b>78,040</b>
<b>Panic Disorder</b>	<b>9.3</b>	<b>66,585</b>
<b>Agoraphobia</b>	<b>15.0</b>	<b>107.395</b>
<b>Any of the Above Disorders</b>	<b>26.5</b>	<b>189,731</b>



# Behavior is an Iceberg



**Filters and Foundations**

Marleen Wong, Director, School  
Crisis and Intervention Unit, UCLA  
and Duke University

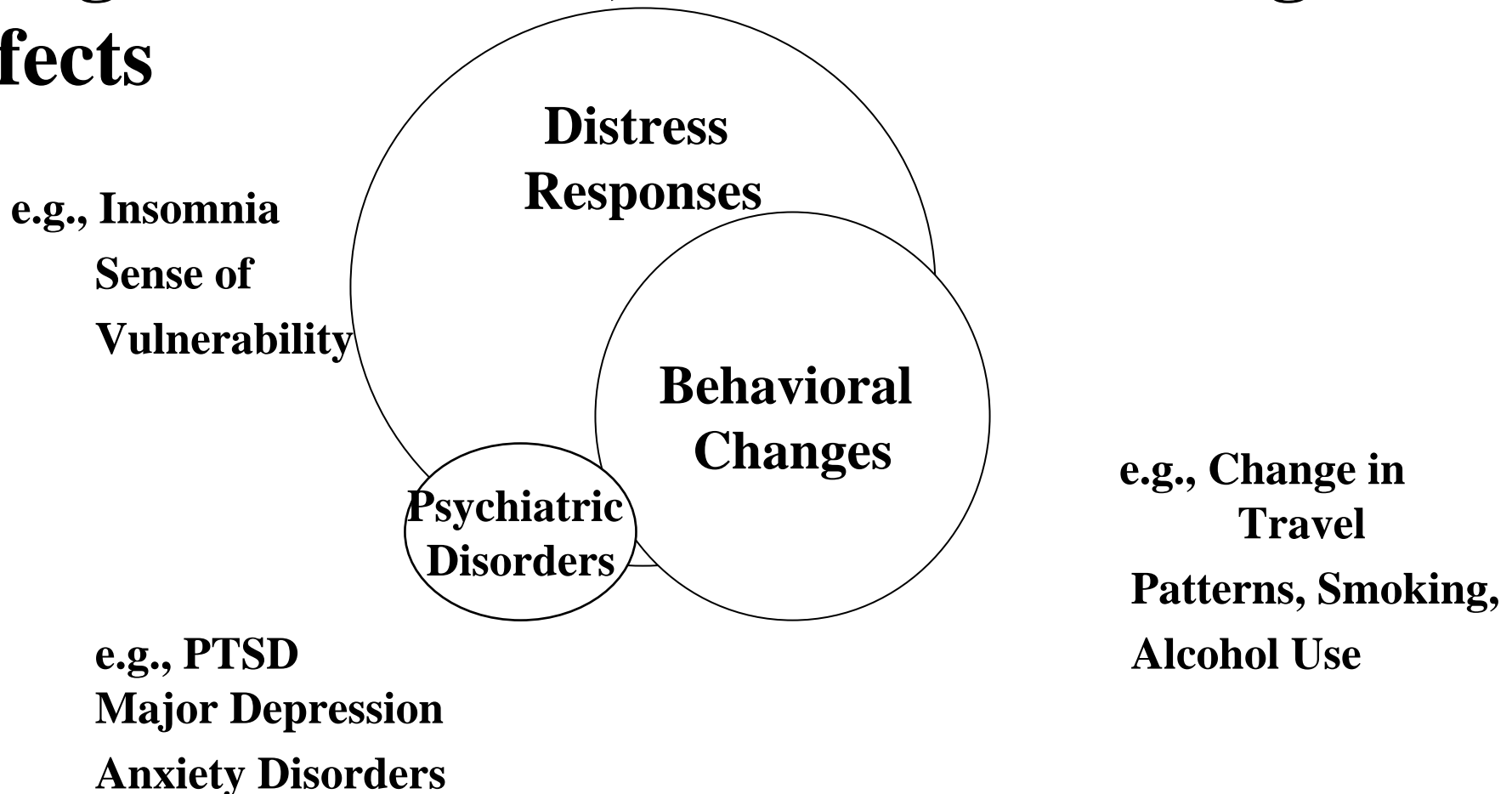
# **Link between Violence Exposure and Chronic PTSD with:**

- **Substance Abuse**
- **Reckless Behavior**
- **High-risk Sexual Behavior**
- **Gang Participation**
- **Disturbances in Academic Functioning**

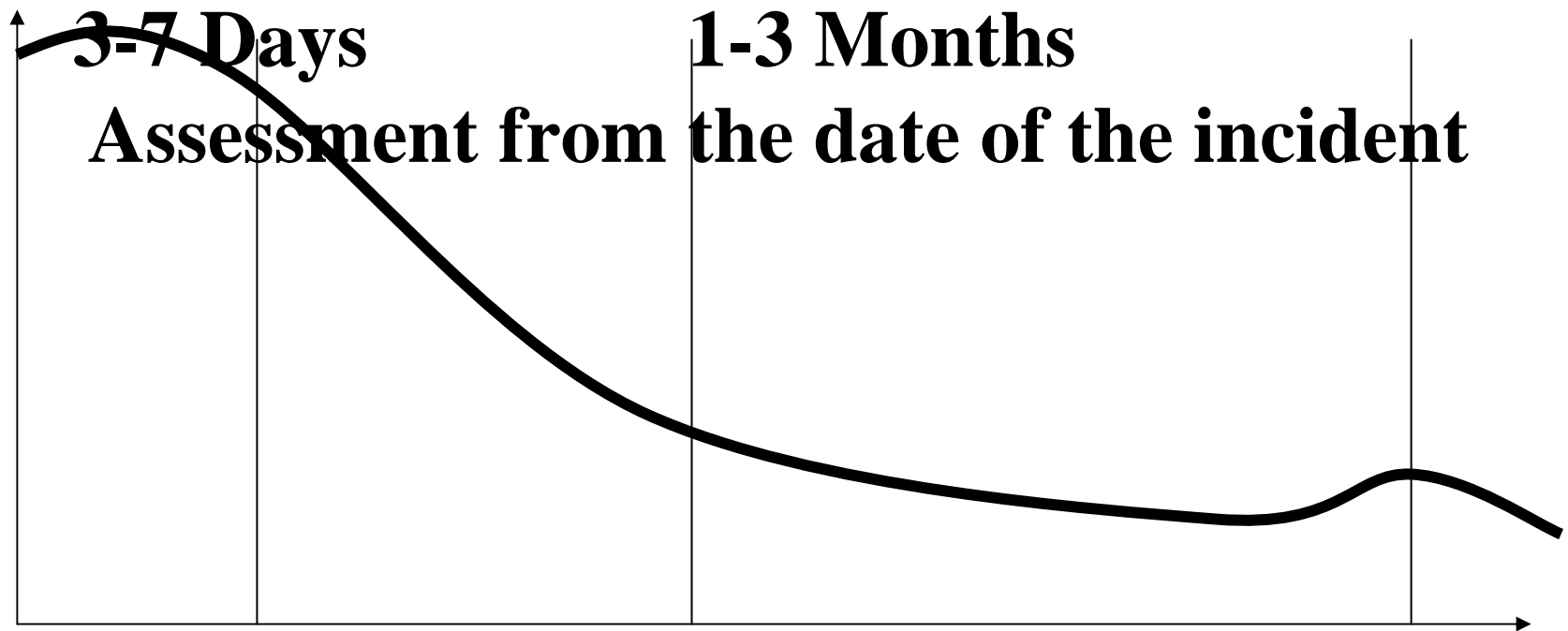
(Kilpatrick, Saunders & Resick, 1998)

# **IOM Report -*Preparing for the Psychological Consequences of Terrorism***

**Range of emotional, behavioral and cognitive effects**



# Students with significant post-traumatic stress symptoms after an event



# Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

## Reexperiencing

- themes in play
- generalized nightmares

- Avoidance

- may not understand “numbing”
- subject to the avoidance of adults
- implications for development

- Emotional Arousal - Evident in school

- Functioning

# **Adult Issues That Affect Children**

- Adults may not recognize distress in children**
- Children may be compliant in the aftermath of an event**
- Adults may be preoccupied with their own issues**
- Adults may deny children's reactions**

# **Multi-Level Intervention Options**

## **Tier 1 – General School-Based Interventions**

**Psychoeducation**

**Coping Skills**

**Support**

## **Tier 2 – Specialized School-Based Interventions**

**Trauma / Grief - Focused Counseling**

**Group, Individual, Family**

**Short-Term**

## **Tier 3 – Specialized Community-Based Interventions**

**Referral to On or Off-Site MH Services**

# Grief and Trauma

## GRIEF

- Generalized reaction:  
**SADNESS**
- Pain is the acknowledgement of the loss
- Guilt may focus on: “I wish I would/would not have...”
- Dreams tend to be of the deceased
- Generally grief reactions stand alone and do not involve trauma reactions

From: *Trauma Debriefing* by William Steele

## TRAUMA

- Generalized reaction:  
**FEAR AND ANXIETY**
- Pain triggers tremendous terror, sense of powerlessness and loss of safety
- Guilt may focus on: “It was my fault. I could have prevented it. It should/could have been me.”
- Dreams are about the self as the potential victim
- Often involves grief reactions (sadness, etc.) in addition to trauma reactions: flashbacks, startle reactions, hypervigilance, numbing, etc.



# Tolerance in the Recovery Environment



Among those with different personal, family, and school levels of impact, courses of recovery, and levels of ongoing concern

# **Violence and Trauma affects School Performance**

## **Children with life threatening violence exposure**

- **Lower GPA**
- **More negative comments in permanent record**
- **More absences**

## **Children with Depression and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder**

- **Even Lower GPA**
- **More absences**

# **Desirable Qualities For School Crisis Team Members**

- **Understanding of school culture/mission**
- **A sense of responsibility beyond routine**
- **Ability to establish rapport quickly**
- **Ability to listen to difficult feelings and experiences of others**
- **Clear about feelings thoughts biases**
- **Maintain confidentiality**
- **Aware of limitations**
- **Aware of the need for self care**

# **First and Most Important**



**Every Adult on  
Campus Plays an  
Important Role**

**Your Attitude and Actions  
Make All the Difference**

# Mental Health Objectives in School Settings

- **Restore the Learning Environment**
- **Re-establish Calm Routine**
- **Assist with Coping and Understanding of Reactions to Danger and Traumatic Stress**
- **Re-unite Students with Caregivers ASAP**
- **Support the Emotional Stabilization of Teachers and Parents**

# Secondary Adversities

## Compound Trauma

- **Loss of Loved Ones**
- **Loss of home, school, cherished belongings**
- **Loss of social, personal, or familial ties**
- **Loss of self-esteem, control over one's life**
- **Loss of resources such as food, money, physical abilities**

# **Advantages of School Based Programs**

- **Schools are “de facto” mental health system for many children**
- **Large numbers of at Risk/Disadvantaged children**
- **Existing Counseling and Specialized Education Programs**
- **Surgeon General’s National Action Agenda for Children’s Mental Health and President’s New Freedom Commission call for increase in school mental health programs**

# Obstacles to School Based Programs

- Difficulty of Entry
- Less than Ideal Clinical Conditions  
(Flushing Meadows)
- Overcoming “Mission Creep”
- Motivating and Educating Educators
- Tailoring the program for schools  
(Bell Schedules, Tracks, Pupil Free Days)



# Impact of Trauma on Schools

- **Change of Teacher Role by State Law?** – Public Safety/Disaster Workers
- **Academic achievement** – Deans/Chairs of Departments
  - Grades and standardized tests
- **Average Daily Attendance (ADA)**-Counselors in the Attendance Office
  - Decreased attendance means less money
- **Special Education Students** and IDEA
  - Special Needs and Common Needs
- **Classroom and School Behavior**-Increased Rates of Suspension, Expulsion, High Risk Behaviors including Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors

# **Violence and Trauma affects School Performance**

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# From the Field of Brain Research

In order for children to learn...

- **Eliminate Threat from the Environment**
- **Eliminate Threat from the Mind**
- **Enrich the Learning Environment**

# Compassion Fatigue

Traumatic **stress affects** both **victim** and **caregivers**

**“There is a cost to caring. We professionals who are paid to listen to the stories of fear, pain, and suffering of others may feel, ourselves, similar fear, pain and suffering because we care.”**

**“Compassion fatigue is the emotional residue of exposure to working with the suffering, particularly those suffering from the consequences of traumatic events.”**

**Charles R. Figley, Ph.D.**

# Dr. Pamela Cantor, Children's Mental Health Alliance, New York

- “The shock, trauma and complexity of our societies don't permit the establishment of working alliances within 60 days. This was the most significant limiting factor in mobilizing an effective response in New York...schools and communities (must) know that collaborative relationships need to be forged, meetings held, and procedures developed well before an event occurs and the immediate phase begins.”

# Dr. Mary Courtney, New York University

“It has been my experience that people typically fall back on the most familiar, over-learned, conceptual framework at times of stress and ambiguity. After 9/11, for example, most educators were primarily concerned with getting the educational process back on track, preferring to focus only on preset roles/structures, and freely admitting that they felt too overwhelmed to enter the unfamiliar territory of mental health. Safety officers tightened safety enforcement and did not feel able to address the mental health repercussions of either the disaster or their response to the disaster. Because of this completely human response to crises, it is necessary to build the mental health response system and the network of relationships that support it before any crisis occurs. ”

# Recovery in Summary

- **Promote Mental Health Education – Effects of Trauma and Exposure to Violence; Course of Recovery**
- **Assessment of Child and School Recovery  
Look at the Calendar**
- **Form Partnerships Now**
- **Be Aware of Your Own Need for Care**

# **READINESS in Schools**

- **Evacuation**
- **Lockdown**
- **Reunion**
- **Media**
- **Recovery**